DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 642 FL 026 854

AUTHOR Dinapoli, Russell; Algarra, Vicky
TITLE Role-Plays as Strategically Active Scenarios.
PUB DATE 2001-05-00
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Congress of the Spanish Association of Applied Linguistics (19th, Leon, Spain, May 3-5, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Applied Linguistics; Communicative Competence (Languages); Cooperative Learning; *Drama; Linguistic Input; Problem Solving; *Role Playing; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

Input must be both contextualized and natural if it is to be coterminous with actual communication, in which interlocutors participate in a cooperative and dialogic process. However, when input becomes decontextualized, discourse shifts to a superficial plane. As is commonly the case in theater, verbal act meaning in the classroom setting is formulated in a scripted text and addressed in terms of speaker intention. Unlike the theater, in a second language (L2) classroom, scenario texts are usually analyzed from a narrower linguistic perspective and their signifiers are linked to communicative problem solving strategies. L2 learners, therefore, rarely have the opportunity to use the L2 with all the implicatory force that accompanies actual performance. They are deprived of the essential part of the actual communicative experience. In this paper, it is maintained that the dynamic interaction of the strategic action sort propounded by DiPetro (1994) and the "process drama" type of approach suggested by Shin-Mei Kao and O'Neill (1998) can help learners to expand their language development to include framework in which input serves to spark output. This paper discusses the fusing of dramatic conflict and role playing in L2 instruction. (Contains 30 references.) (KFT)

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Role-plays as Strategically Active Scenarios

RUSSELL DINAPOLI
Universidad de Valencia
VICKY ALGARRA
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia

ED 456 642

Input must be both contextualized and natural if it is to be conterminous with actual communication, in which interlocutors participate in a cooperative and dialogic process. However, when input becomes decontextualised, discourse shifts to a superficial plane. As is commonly the case in the theatre, verbal act meaning in the classroom setting is formulated in a scripted text and addressed in terms of speaker intention, discourse types or language management for the sake of persuading or sharing information. But unlike the theatre, where actors bring to the scripts spontaneous interplay, in the L2 classroom scenario texts are usually analyzed mainly from a narrow linguistic perspective, and their signifiers are linked to communicative problem-solving strategies. L2 learners, therefore, rarely have the opportunity to use the language, with all the implicatory force that accompanies actual performance. They are deprived of an essential part of actual communicative experience. In this paper we maintain that dynamic interaction of the strategic action sort propounded by Di Pietro (1994) and the "process drama" type of approach as suggested by Shin-Mei Kao and O'Neill (1998) can help learners to expand their language development to include a framework in which input serves to spark output.

The route to foreign language fluency has various levels, with feeder roads and interchanges for each one, and along which learners, with the help, and at times unwitting hindrance of their instructors, take halting steps. The exposure second language learners often have to the target language is paltry compared with the exposure they received while acquiring their respective mother tongues. Contextualized input during the L2 acquisition process is, understandably, far less intensely thorough. The natural input of L1 acquisition often becomes a mere device in the L2 learning process, especially if the greater part of the input is provided in a classroom setting, where contextualized experience is a hybrid of what it is in "real" life.

Not having experienced natural, spontaneous communication enough to develop discoursal skills fully, these second language learners are commonly hard pressed to follow a simple conversation, not to mention to participate actively in one. Even those whose command of vocabulary and grammar may have earned them top scores on tests all too often find it difficult to sort through the innumerable implicit meanings of contextualization cues in natural discourse. This is because the linguistic formation of many of these high achievers commonly rests on a foundation consisting of book learned and classroom drilled "conventional discourse" that has hardly been tempered by the "communicative potential of the language" (Widdowson 1985: 85).

Input must be both contextualized and natural if it is to be conterminous with actual communication, in which interlocutors participate in a cooperative and dialogic process. However, when input becomes decontextualised, as it often does in the orthodox classroom setting, discourse shifts to a somewhat superficial plane.

To repeat a well-known phrase coined by Austin, to say something is to do something. But performatories, being neither true nor false but felicitous or infelicitous in accordance with, among other constraints, circumstance and character, tend to seem, in Austin's (1997: 22) assessment, "insincere", in the learning context of the classroom. Moreover, they are often, or so it seems to us, as "parasitic" as those uttered by actors on stage.

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theatre, where actors bring to the scripts spontaneous, creative play and interplay, in the L2 classroom scenario texts are usually analysed mainly from a narrow linguistic perspective, and their signifiers are linked to communicative problem-solving strategies. As a result, L2 learners rarely have the opportunity to use the language, with all the implicatory force (Grice 1989) that goes with the idea of actual performance. They are, therefore, deprived of an essential part of actual communicative experience. To draw an analogy, their linguistic growth is stunted.

L2 classroom processes tend to eschew heterodoxy. Yet, as Grice observes, inference of a non-conventional sort is in fact an important part of actual communication. That is to say, the experience of successfully conveying inferences in L2 is vital to the process of learning a second or foreign language. It is our belief that by fomenting a general cooperative principle this can be achieved through self-expression. In this sense, Grice's (1989: 28) maxim of Quality, by which he means "I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious", is crucial.

Problem-solving of the game playing sort is one way of getting the learner more involved in discoursal strategies. However, rarely do games affectively involve the players.

Yet, though emotion is fundamental to human expression, seldom are means to express it provided for in the conventional English as a Second Language (ESL) learning context. This especially applies to Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses such as Business English, where it would seem that emotional displays are impeachable. Understandably there is a general disinclination among teachers to risk fomenting complicated emotional episodes in class. One cannot, after all, systematize emotional reactions as easily as one can language functions and syntactic structures. For to do otherwise would call for a classroom pedagogy that focuses not only on planning academic learning and language production, but also on instituting processes that emotionally involve learners so that they may acquire what Stern (1984: 411) refers to as "an affective strategy". Focusing as they generally do on productive language execution, classroom strategies in general "are relevant to the planning phase" (Bialystok 1994: 20), and as such both teachers and students are rarely prepared to handle, let alone exploit, unplanned displays of actual communication.

However, developments in pragmatics provide a few guidelines that can be set up for the purpose of involving learners in discourse at a more personal level and "for the efficient and effective use of language in conversation to further co-operative ends" (Levinson 1995: 101). Towards this end, Grice's four maxims of conversation—the co-operative principle or principle of appropriateness; the maxim of Quality, or truthfulness; the maxim of Quantity, or appropriate length; and the maxim of Relevance—are helpful. Implicature, or the inferences the interlocutors make, in effect seems to be guided by these sub-maxims. Talks of this nature are characteristically "cooperative efforts" (Grice 1989: 26), and conversational implicature will be intuitively grasped if the sub-maxims or conventions are not followed to the letter.

Unfortunately, it is precisely this non-conventional use of the language that is commonly absent in L2 pedagogical processes, which tend to be over-regulated. As a result, students are often constrained by the classroom context itself, in which, in the end, their attention is focused on the pressing fact that their performance is being evaluated in terms of the correct or incorrect usage or the proper execution of strategic moves. There is a limit to what can be learned from focusing too much on infelicities or implicature in prepared texts, as is often the case in ESL and LSP courses. Actual communication is not tantamount to verbal displays in which convention is flaunted in role-plays or practiced in

oral drills. Moreover, if students are not allowed to experiment with non-convention, then they can hardly be expected to learn how to infer in the language.

We maintain that dynamic interaction of the strategic action sort propounded by Di Pietro (1994) and the "process drama" type of approach as suggested by Shin-Mei Kao and O'Neill (1998) can help learners to expand their language development to include a framework in which input serves to spark output. In this respect, the fusing of dramatic conflict and role-playing has been successfully carried out in Business English courses at the tertiary level (Dinapoli 2000, 1999a, 1999b, Dinapoli and Algarra 2000, Gimenez and Dinapoli 1999), and the process can further be used in other Language for Specific courses, ranging from tourism to architecture and nursing.

Dramatic action focused role-playing works in tandem with the functional or strategic move pedagogical mode. Depicting human responses to events in situations, drama gives learners the opportunity not only to use the specific language they are studying in context, but also to become more personally involved in expressing themselves while doing so. The key to generating this fusion is emotional conflict, which drama or a strategic interaction format can provide, helping learners come to grips with coping, in Stern's (1984: 411) words, "effectively with the emotional and motivational problems of language learning".

Drama used as a pedagogical technique can be found in the literature. While some authors (See, e.g., Collie and Slater 1990, Lazar 1993, and Whiteson 1996) subsume drama under general literature, others focus specifically on the use of drama in second and foreign language teaching. (See, e.g. Parry 1972; Via 1976; Nomura 1982; Smith 1984; Maley and Duff 1984; Di Pietro 1994, Kao and O'Neill 1998) Additionally, various authors focus on specific aspects involving the use of drama in the language learning context: Hegman (1990) discusses the impact of affect on cognition; Stern (1980) analyses the pyscholinguistic variables involved; Scarcella (1978) suggests using "socio-drama" to heighten classroom interaction; Via (1987) proposes introducing "the magic if" to stimulate the imagination; and Courtney (1990) places drama on a par with intelligence.

Di Pietro (1994) suggests that using scenarios in a task-based system foments natural discourse experience and as result, the development of linguistic skills in the target language. Textbook authors today include in their works role-playing activities aimed at getting students to perform in scenarios. Most of these textbook scenarios, however, hardly if ever capture the dramatic aspect of a actual human interaction, which Di Pietro (13) claims "enhances retention of what is learned when interaction is performed".

Many role-play scenarios are of the look-at-the-file-card type, in which, as in Sweeney's (1997: 12) Business English textbook, students are given the following or similarly worded instructions: "Work in pairs. Student A should look at File card 3A and Student B should look at File card 3B." Looking at the designated file card, Student A reads what follows:

> Your partner is a visitor to the town where you live and/or work. You would like to invite him/her to a social event or provide some entertainment. Think about the possibilities, then find out his/her preferences and make an arrangement with him/her. Suggestion: Look in a local *What's* On guide or newspaper to see if there are any special attractions on now. (131)

Succumbing to levity in class when faced with this sort of role-play would certainly not be amiss. Essaying something in broken English about what's on in town to a hypothetical visitor invites puckish remarks and ironic utterances that, were the role-play activity allowed to take this non-conventional direction, would transform the dialogue into something potentially more meaningful for the performers. This is precisely what strategic interaction tries to encourage role-play performers to do. It is not unlike what

happens in discourse when a speaker flouts some of Grice's maxims for the sake of inference. Unfortunately, in the ESL and LSP classroom framework, role-plays of the sort provided by Sweeny are all too often executed in a rather routine fashion, not without a shopworn weariness that beggars the author's well-intentioned pedagogical aim.

Role-playing strictly to a conventional format is not unlike drill practicing in the audio-lingual method, with its fashion for dialogues centring on graded structures, and the situational method, with its dialogues under situational headings such as "At Work" or "At the Post Office". As Finnochiaro and Brumfit (1983: 8-9) observe, the shortcomings in methods such as these is that, the context being related to one social situation, there is "little or no deviation" possible; it makes no difference that "in real-life speech we do not generally adhere to the same vocabulary area in a conversation". We might add that the functional-notional curriculum approach, for all its laudable intentions to set goals of communication and interaction, with its break down of language into units based on analyses of students' needs and operational specification for learning objectives, did not overcome the shortcomings of these earlier methods. Moreover, to a large extent many textbook writers still follow the functional-notional tradition in this respect. Hollet (1995: 63), for example, after succinctly presenting three functions, each with three different grammar exponents, offers her readers a simple flow chart made up of those functions and instructs the learners to "Practice the phrases with a colleague. Suggest solutions to the problem below. Follow this pattern."

Many opaque gaps exist between what is said and understood in a conversation. Embedded among the salient indications of factual meaning is another meaning, which pragmatics focuses attention on. Patterns of discourse types (Mulholland 1991) and "involvement strategies" (Tannen 1989) reveal the variety of suggestive interstices that are inferred in actual communication. It is our belief that strategic interaction is one way of bringing this kaleidoscope of meaning into play in the foreign language classroom.

The trouble with tasks such as the ones alluded to in this paper is that students are rarely motivated by them enough to venture into actual communication. At best, role-playing is carried out in an atmosphere of drill-like routine or derring-do. Focusing mainly on a potpourri of functions, or more recently, phalanxes of strategies and moves, teachers and students have little or no time to pay homage to the deeper underlying human aspects of simple dialogue. It is for this reason that a framework for role-playing that involves interactive scenarios is needed in the ESL and LSP learning process.

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Russell DiNapoli 21 July 2001

Vicky Algarra 21 July 2001